



Small Investments, Big Changes

:: Successful Examples of Projects in Local Communities ::



Academy for Educational Development



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:: Introduction ::

The CroNGO Small Grants Program entitled “Our Community: How Can We Improve It?” assisted many formal and informal citizen groups to improve the quality of life in their communities. Over a two-year period, the program supported 221 community projects in cooperation with CroNGO’s Partners: SMART, the Organization for Civic Initiatives (OGI) and Association MI.

Supporting the initiatives of local citizens in all areas of Croatia was a valuable experience in community mobilization and development. This booklet presents several successful examples of ongoing community projects assisted by the CroNGO Small Grants Program with an emphasis on three areas stressed throughout the program: citizen activism, local partnerships, and organizational capacity.

Covering a range of programs, from local economic development, to historical preservation, to needed social outreach and services, these examples show the positive impact local citizens can have when working together to improve their communities. Although they represent a mere fraction of what was accomplished through CroNGO’s Small Grants Program, these examples serve as an excellent overview of the program’s achievements.

“Smaller communities are especially challenging when we are talking about changes. Citizens like to wait for someone else to bring about change. This is a slow process and because of that CroNGO’s efforts to mobilize local communities are very important.”

Milka Gorup,
Head of Social Affairs Department, Pregrada,
Krapinsko-zagorska County



>> Zадарска County supported the work of Association “Vihor” and acknowledged the hard work of their volunteers.

.....

The entire CroNGO team would like to express their gratitude to its donor — the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) — as well as all program partners, sub-grantees and others who participated in or supported the Small Grants Program.

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Citizen Activism >>

Active participation of citizens in local level activities promotes sustainable, long term benefits for local communities. Citizens who participate in community projects take pride in the success of their work and enjoy the combined sense of ownership they share with their neighbors and fellow volunteers.

"In our community, citizens became more interested in being involved in our project after we gave them a chance to openly discuss community issues and needs."

Dora Radosavljević,
Environmental NGO "Franjo Košćec",
Varaždin



>> Volunteers renovate a community center in Slavonia.

The CroNGO Small Grants Program supported community-based projects that sought to address specific community needs through innovative, volunteer-based programs. In total, over 50,000 citizens were mobilized through projects implemented in over 200 communities across Croatia. Each of the examples below highlights the important role that citizens played in these projects.

"When the action to create a children's playground with CroNGO support was organized in Dragalic, many citizens came out to assist. This was the first time that something like this happened in our community."

Zdenko Gorup, Head of Dragalić Municipality,
Brodsko-posavska County



Local Partnerships >>

Partnerships and cooperation between local civil society organizations, individual citizens, educational institutions, local government, and local businesses are important ingredients in any community development effort. By pooling resources, these stakeholders can accomplish more than they could alone.

Local partnerships also raise the profile of local initiatives, increasing awareness in the community and encouraging others to become involved. The CroNGO Small Grants Program encouraged the development of such partnerships at the local level.

"We recognized the value of CroNGO supported projects since all of them were responding to concrete needs in our community. Also, in the past 2 years we learned how much local NGOs can assist us in responding more appropriately to our community needs."

Dalibor Rohlik, Deputy Mayor of
Daruvar, Bjelovarsko-bilogorska County

Approximately 80% of CroNGO supported projects were implemented in cooperation with local authorities, businesses, educational institutions, and other organizations. Examples of local authorities' input to projects included providing physical space for the implementation of project activities, hosting community meetings, offering financial support, and organizing community events. Active local businesses assisted projects through

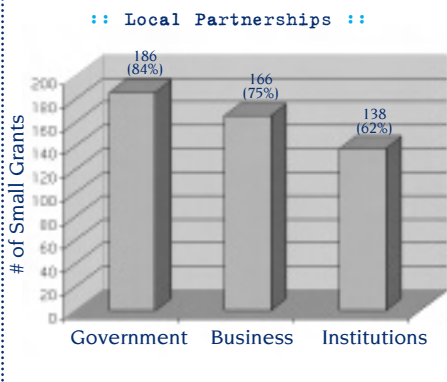
financial contributions, donation of materials and labor, and transportation services. Local institutions such as schools, museums, libraries, and social service providers often donated their time and expertise to training or other educational needs. Such local partnerships played an important role in all five of the examples highlighted in this publication.



<< Portal Alfa established a Community Information Center with support from CroNGO, local authorities and businesses.

"Without support from local authorities and local institutions it would be impossible to implement our project successfully. This is important because after the end of CroNGO funds, the local government will be providing support for our activities in the community."

Dragan Radmanović, NGO of disabled persons from Varaždin,
Varaždinska County





Organizational Development >>

Throughout its work, CroNGO is committed to strengthening the organizations it supports. The Small Grants Program had the twin goals of having an immediate impact in the community by supporting a specific project, but also leaving behind stronger organizations and citizens' groups with the capacity to continue initiating and implementing community development initiatives. While all grant recipients had good ideas and enthusiasm, many needed assistance with program management and organizational development.



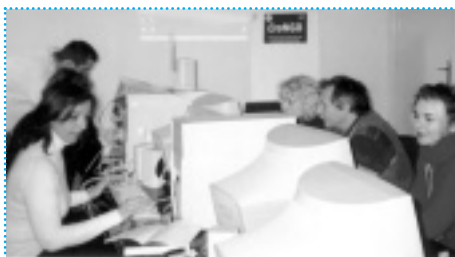
>> Association Friend from Kozari Bok worked on their organizational development

"Through the assistance we received from the CroNGO program, we learned how to make good plans for the short and long term, how to present our work to the public, and become more closer to citizens. This experience was a great challenge in the development of our organization and today we are able to celebrate our new successes!"

Mira Katalenić, Croatian Association for the Training of Guide Dogs and Mobility, Zagreb

Over 80% of supported projects were located in communities outside of main cities, and a similar percentage had never received any external support before.

Through both direct assistance from CroNGO staff and cross-training among groups of recipients, the program helped grantees improve their skills in a number of areas including volunteer management, grant administration, financial management, and other organizational development topics. CroNGO technical support and training also helped small grant recipients to increase their visibility, involve more volunteers, and establish or improve local partnerships with an eye toward long-term sustainability. <<



>> The Association of War Veterans improved their knowledge and skills for cooperating with the business sector

"Through the assistance we received from the CroNGO Small Grants Program, we learned a lot about different administrative procedures and improved our internal procedures... Before getting this support we were not aware of the importance of NGO administrative management."

Sonja Jakovljević, Youth Association HRAM, Split, Splitsko-dalmatinska County

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:NGO:

Association for
Healthy Life and
Healthy Nature
"Trbuhovica"

.....

:Project:

Construction of a
Recreational Path in
the Vicinity of Prezid

.....

:Awarded amount:

69.935,14 kn

.....

:Project dates:

1 March 2003
to
20 September 2003

.....

:Local

community:

Prezid,
Primorsko-goranska
County

.....

:: Path to a Stronger Community ::

Prezid is a small city in Primorsko-goranska County in the mountains near the border with Slovenia. Including the surrounding villages and settlements, Prezid has a population of only 1,000. This already small population is rapidly decreasing as young people leave Prezid for the larger cities given the scarcity of employment opportunities in the area.

Despite the currently weak economic conditions in the region, Prezid's residents are optimistic that income and employment opportunities can be increased by highlighting the area's natural beauty and cultural heritage to develop the local tourism industry.

The Association *Trbuhovica* received a CroNGO small grant to begin making this vision a reality by constructing a 7.5 km long recreational path in the area. CroNGO funds allowed them to rent equipment needed to complete the path and to print informational signs, maps, and brochures for visitors. The completed trail connects several interesting sites, including three small churches, several private museums depicting village life and customs, and hunting and mountaineering lodges. The path is promoted in Slovenian and Croatian newspapers and magazines and tourist agencies, and is already attracting visitors, primarily from Slovenia and the Rijeka area.



Citizen Activism >>

While *Trbuhovica* took the lead in this project, the final results are truly due to the efforts of a large number of Prezid's citizens. Approximately 50 people were actively involved in this initiative, participating in various activities such as clearing brush, building the path, preparing food and refreshments for other volunteers, and creating the tourist map.

"The beginning was the hardest. But every year more and more citizens are becoming interested in NGO actions."

A young woman from Prezid

Those who volunteered to help with the project are proud of the work they have done. An elderly citizen shared his view that, *“years ago, the idea to create this path seemed utopian, but today we believe that the path will bring us more life. Trbuhovica began to work on the details that will help us create a full tourist picture in our community.”*

Over a year after the completion of the CroNGO grant, local citizens are still involved in Trbuhovica's activities, either by bringing food or volunteering their time to help with various activities. Other citizens have been inspired by the creation of the path to create related tourist offerings. Three families have restored village houses as small folk museums that can be visited by tourists hiking along the path. Seven families are working to provide accommodations for tourists by opening guest apartments, while another family is planning to open a small hotel with a wellness center. All of these emerging businesses now have a greater chance for success due to the area's expanded offering for tourists. Trbuhovica is assisting all of these families by providing them with promotional tourist brochures developed with CroNGO support and by visiting them on a regular basis.



Local Partnerships >>

As a result of the CroNGO-funded project, local authorities now view Trbuhovica as an equal partner working with them to develop the Prezid area. As the city mayor emphasized: *“The city supports Trbuhovica's efforts and provides them with all available assistance. Thanks to the work of Trbuhovica, Prezid is now a lovely tourist city.”*

Business support was also valuable during implementation of the CroNGO-supported project. Many local businesses donated manpower and equipment for the reconstruction of the path. Trbuhovica remains in contact with these businesses and expects to work with them again on future initiatives.



>> Informational signs guide tourists along the path



Organizational Development >>

The CroNGO grant was the first external financial support that Trbuhovica or the community of Prezid had ever received. As such, it served as a valuable opportunity to learn more about project planning and development, management of financial resources, and fundraising. Their successful completion of the grant raised Trbuhovica's confidence, and helped them to establish cross-border cooperation with a Slovenian NGO. These two organizations jointly developed a large program to protect local water sources, which recently received support through the EU CARDS program.



Summary of CroNGO Impact >>

As a result of a small investment by the CroNGO program, the citizens of Prezid have been inspired to work actively and entrepreneurially to improve living conditions in this mountain area by making their city more attractive to tourists. The creation of the path encouraged citizen activism and built awareness of local development needs. The project also inspired many to develop or improve their small business offerings.

Since completing their CroNGO grant, *Trbuhovica* has begun work on the new phase of the project, creating a list of priorities and future activities, including the production of promotional materials for tourists, training sessions for local citizens to serve as tourist guides, and a collection of community stories that would be interesting for tourists. If their success in developing the path is any indication, Prezid will be an increasingly popular tourist destination over the next few years as a result of *Trbuhovica*'s work. <<



>> One local family opened
ethno-gallery of old tools near
the path

:: New Youth Center Energizes Young People in Koprivnica ::

The city of Koprivnica, with a population 30,000, is the main city in Koprivničko-križevačka County. Though a relatively small city, Koprivnica has a large youth population, with approximately 6,000 primary and secondary school students. Despite its large student population, Koprivnica lacked a safe and appropriate place for youth to gather. Instead, young people would meet in parks and city squares, or bars and restaurants outside of the city. Sensing a problem, *Hyper*, a youth association created in 2001 to organize cultural activities among young people and others, conducted a needs assessment among the youth in Koprivnica. The assessment indicated that the creation of adequate space for various youth activities was a high priority and that many youth were interested in planning different programs and activities.

"This project activated not only the Association Hyper but also other youth initiatives in the city. Today, they are jointly planning new creative projects"
Helena Hečimović, Gradsko poglavarstvo Koprivnice

Bolstered by the findings of the needs assessment, *Hyper* worked with the city government of Koprivnica to identify a solution to this problem. The local authorities agreed to provide *Hyper* with a deserted former Croatian Army facility to convert into a youth center. The building, however, needed significant reconstruction to make it safe to use. *Hyper* then applied to and received a CroNGO Small Grant to help renovate the building and purchase needed equipment.

Hyper used the CroNGO funds to renovate the building and purchase new musical equipment and loudspeakers. This immediately led to an increase in the number of musical, cultural, and other social events aimed at youth in Koprivnica. *Hyper* has also been successful in involving a large number of youth in different activities, such as music listening rooms, movie projections, concerts, and theater presentations. Now called the *Koprivnica Youth Center*, the building also provides work space for 10 local NGOs providing different services and organizing activities for children, youth, and other community groups.

.....
:NGO:
Association "Hyper"
.....

:Project:
Koprivnica Youth Center
.....

:Awarded amount:
59.022,62 kn
.....

:Project dates:
1 February 2003
to
30 September 2003
.....

:Local
community:
Koprivnica,
Kopriivničko-
križevačka County
.....



Citizen Activism >>

Immediately after receiving permission from the city authorities to manage the new youth center, *Hyper* invited volunteers to help with the renovation work. Citizens, primarily young people, volunteered to clean the building, move and arrange equipment for future activities, and help organize community events to promote the new center. Ultimately, *Hyper* succeeded in mobilizing approximately 100 young people in the renovation works; approximately half of these continue to work with *Hyper* to develop and implement new youth programs and activities.

Hyper's activities have benefited a much wider number of citizens, involving over 3,000 people in various events and activities to date. For example, *Hyper* organized exhibitions of children's art in cooperation with local schools and kindergartens and held celebrations to mark the Day of Kindergartens and Flower Day. In cooperation with city authorities, they also participated in the Koprivnica Summer Festival by organizing sports activities for youth, a concert of youth musical groups, and other activities for children. *Hyper* is also well-known for organizing a local youth football tournament, at which they collected 10,000.00 kuna that was donated to the local high school to purchase audio/visual equipment needed for different activities.



Local Partnerships >>

Hyper's success in Koprivnica depended on the close partnerships they developed with a number of other local actors, including the city government, local businesses, the tourist office, and local schools.

The city government of Koprivnica played a critical role in the creation of the youth center. City authorities not only provided *Hyper* with access to the former army building, but were so impressed with the renovation work *Hyper* completed through CroNGO support, that they invested another 500,000 kuna to complete renovations and to fund youth center operations. They continue to provide ongoing support, advice and assistance as needed. The city government is also working with *Hyper* to develop a system for the future self-financing of the center to ensure its sustainability.

Podravka, a major Croatian food company based in Koprivnica, has also provided significant support to *Hyper* and the *Koprivnica Youth Center*. During the renovation process, they donated old chairs which were needed for the center's larger events, such as theatre



>> Zvonimir Mršić, Mayor of Koprivnica, and Helena Hečimović, Member of the City Council, met with members of *Hyper*

presentations and concerts. Additionally, Podravka donates refreshments to *Hyper* for different activities on a regular basis and keeps a large refrigerator in the center stocked with its products. *Hyper* has also established successful cooperation with *Croatian Telecom* (HT). As a result of this partnership, HT donated computers and Internet access to develop an Internet café in the *Koprivnica Youth Center* that provides free Internet services to youth.

Hyper also worked with the Koprivničko-križevačka County Tourist Office, city authorities and three local high schools to organize a festival called *Creative Summer* in the summer of 2004. Programs such as workshops in drama, music, and art for children, were led by some of *Hyper*'s youth representatives. In cooperation with the Artisan's School, *Hyper* will organize a crafts fair in the fall of 2004, which will be a unique opportunity for Koprivnica's youth to promote their creative achievements.



Organizational Development >>

Hyper's participation in the CroNGO Small Grants Program had a profound impact on their strength as an organization.

The successful development of a new youth center responded to a clear need in the community, and helped *Hyper* expand its contacts with local youth and partner organizations. The donation of the facility and the CroNGO grant sparked a need to prioritize and efficiently organize their work, forcing them to further develop their organizational structures.

With assistance from CroNGO, *Hyper* addressed a number of organizational development needs which helped it successfully complete the renovation project and strengthen its internal operations. Now, *Hyper* has formal organizational structures and organize bi-weekly meetings with their members to discuss tasks and activities for the upcoming week. They have also developed a plan of future activities and are working with their local partners to implement a number of these.



>> A workshop organized by *Hyper* for youth in their new youth center

According to *Hyper* members, the renovation project improved their position in the community and citizens now have a very positive perception of their work. The relationships they strengthened with the city government and Podravka under the CroNGO grant continue to be important and they expect to receive continued financial and in-kind support from both.



Summary of CroNGO Impact >>

The new *Koprivnica Youth Center*, renovated with CroNGO assistance, provides young people in Koprivnica with a safe and comfortable place to meet. Young people now also have the possibility to plan and carry out events. The youth center has also helped *Hyper* expand its outreach programs and plan more youth-oriented activities through cooperation with local partners and other NGOs.

Mrs. Helena Hečimović, a member of the city council who oversees Koprivnica's youth programs, described the impact of this project and the work done so far as, *"the most positive thing that has happened in the past few years for the youth in Koprivnica."* <<

:: What Do Grandmothers' Trunks Hide? ::

The municipality of Stara Gradiška, located on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, has a population of 1,500. The majority of inhabitants are returnees who came back to the city after the end of the war. Another large portion of inhabitants are ethnic Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina that came to live in the city during the war in that country.

The economy in Stara Gradiška is based mostly on agriculture and small and medium enterprises, although these sectors are still in the early phase of development. The lingering impact of the war has been both physical and emotional. Neighborhoods were caught in heavy fighting and a number of residences were destroyed, along with many families' lifelong possessions. The Cultural and Art Society *Posavina* was formed to preserve and promote local cultural heritage within Stara Gradiška and neighboring areas. By promoting cultural awareness, the organization hopes to redevelop a sense of community solidarity among residents and inspire citizens of all ages to become more active in community life. Additionally, the focus on cultural traditions provides a constructive means to channel the nationalism that still exists in the region.

Through the project "What Do Grandmother's Trunks Hide?," the Cultural and Art Society *Posavina* raised awareness about the importance of preserving local traditions and culture that were badly damaged or destroyed during the war. Inspired by the *škrinje*, a trunk used by many Croatians to store family heirlooms, the project restored ten vintage folk costumes, repaired antique musical instruments, and taught local youth to play these instruments. Also, with CroNGO assistance *Posavina* organized several community events to present the project's achievements.

According to the president of *Posavina*, Dragan Franješević, CroNGO funds initiated and inspired the numerous activities they are engaged in now. *"The project was like opening Pandora's Box. We initiated a process of discovering so many old traditions that had already been forgotten. We are now more aware of the need to preserve our national heritage. The CroNGO project helped us to just scratch the surface. Now we have to continue with our preservation efforts."*

::NGO::

Cultural and Art
Society *Posavina* Stara
Gradiška

::Project::

What Do
Grandmothers'
Trunks Hide?

::Awarded amount::

23,638,00 kn

::Project dates::

2 October 2002
to
1 January 2003

::Local

community::

Stara Gradiška,
Brodsko-posavska
County



Citizen Activism >>

The success of the project was largely due to the active participation of a large number of citizens who contributed both their time and personal items to help preserve cultural treasures and traditions. Over 350 citizens of this small community participated in the project in some way, either as a volunteer or as a participant in various activities. One volunteer states *"My motivation was to find out more about old customs and to revive the remembrance of my grandparents' way of living."*

Since the end of the project in early 2003, citizens of all ages have remained actively involved in *Posavina's* work. Volunteers organize drama courses and performances for preschool children. A group of school children attend dance, music and singing groups. At many events, older citizens are responsible for assuring that food and drinks are prepared in traditional ways. Women prepare food based on old recipes and make costumes for performances, while men make brandy, a traditional part of any celebration in Slavonia. Others help organize facilities to host activities or inform community members about events. In addition to this active involvement, many more citizens attend these events as visitors. *Posavina* estimates that they engage approximately 500 citizens on a regular basis, and an even higher number when large events are organized.



>> Presentation of restored vintage folk costumes in the elementary school in Stara Gradiška



Local Partnerships >>

The support *Posavina* now receives from the local government is critical to their success. Local government support covers most of their expenses, including office space and utility costs. In 2002, when *Posavina* first received CroNGO funds, the picture was quite different — they had never received government support. After successfully implementing the CroNGO project, however, the local government provided them with 28,000 kuna in 2003.

Posavina's work with CroNGO also helped them to look to local business as a potential source of support. Despite the fact that the economy in the region is weak, *Posavina* has been successful in receiving small in-kind donations from a few local businesses. One local shop provided them with space for their posters, while local bars and a bakery donated refreshments for events held in the community.

"I recognize Posavina as the only NGO that promotes cultural activities and gathers a large number of citizens. Their special contribution is that they gather all people from children to elderly citizens, while other NGOs only gather specific age groups."

Štefica Slovinac, Deputy Head of the Municipality Stara Gradiška

Another business provided financial support for a trip to Lošinj for a conference of cultural and art societies.

Posavina's increased visibility and improved reputation in the community has had other beneficial effects as well. They are now regularly asked for their input in solving a variety of problems in the community. For example, while there is a primary school in Stara Gradiška, students must travel to Nova Gradiška every day to attend middle school. The city does not have a permit for a middle school is because they do not have an adequate library. Recognizing the positive role that Posavina plays in the community, the school contacted

them for their assistance in solving this problem. Posavina immediately responded by developing an ongoing book collection program to develop a proper library so that a middle school in Stara Gradiška can eventually be opened.



Organizational Development >>

Since receiving their CroNGO grant, Posavina has been much more active in the community, constantly expanding their program activities. While they had a significant number of members and beneficiaries before this project, through the project they increased the number of volunteers and they are now recognized in their community as an active organization gathering people of all ages. Local radio stations have recently broadcast programs created by Posavina on musical and other cultural traditions.

Posavina was especially appreciative of the opportunity to meet and develop partnerships with other NGOs through their participation in the CroNGO quarterly sub-grantees meetings. *"The CroNGO sub-grantee meeting helped us widen our field of activities. The diverse range of activities that we saw encouraged us to think of everything that we lacked in our community. We realized that a lot of things can be done, and the main precondition for that is to organize people. So we did."*



Summary of CroNGO Impact >>

Although the project was specifically aimed at restoring traditional clothing and instruments to help teach local citizens about their cultural heritage, it has had an impact far beyond the original expectations. Posavina has succeeded in involving more and more citizens in their programs, building cultural awareness and community solidarity in the process. Additionally, now that the community has experience volunteering and organizing activities, citizens are inspired to do more and are confident that they have the ability to carry out creative activities.

A noted aspect of *Posavina*'s programs is the organization's focus on involving everyone in the community, from young people to the elderly, and promoting interaction between the two. The organization is able to tap the older generation's knowledge of traditions and customs and then pass this information on to young people through its educational programs.

Posavina's ambitions for the future are expanding. As Željka Zečević, the project leader, stated, *"We will continue all the activities started with this project, taking care of folk costumes and instruments that were restored. We will also continue to educate more young people to play these instruments, and work with older citizens and use their memory of traditions, customs, and ways of celebrating events."* One of *Posavina*'s most ambitious future plans is to collect and publish a collection of old songs, games and dances from the region.

When *Posavina* applied to the CroNGO program, their goal was to preserve the traditional ways of singing and dancing. What began as a modest restoration project helped *Posavina* to increase citizen involvement in cultural programs in Stara Gradiška and carry out more activities than they had originally thought possible.

The success of the project has also helped *Posavina* to develop its reputation as one of the few sponsors of cultural and social programs in the region. They asked local citizens to look in their grandmothers' trunk for folk costumes and instruments to preserve. But once they opened those trunks, *Posavina* and the community found much more than they expected. <<



>> Presentation of restored vintage folk costumes in the elementary school in Stara Gradiška

:: Bridge Towards a Better Future for Youth ::

With over 180,000 residents, Split is the second largest city in Croatia and a busy port city that serves as a main hub for Croatia's trade and tourism industries.

Like most large cities, Split is coming to terms with a growing need to provide effective social services. In particular, Split lacks effective programs and resources for the prevention of youth delinquency, behavioral problems, and drug abuse. Association *Bridge* (Most) was founded in 1995 to deal with these issues through various activities with youth and the homeless that utilize volunteerism and peer support. After almost 10 years of work, *Bridge* is now an experienced organization with good working relationships among the citizens, government, and other civil society organizations in Split, as well as the surrounding area.

Bridge received a CroNGO Small Grant to expand the work of its counseling center in Split where youth and their parents can turn for a range of support services related to behavioral, learning, and communication problems. *Bridge* now works with around 60 youth, aged 14 to 18, with problems ranging from neglect or abuse by their families, poor attendance in school, and learning problems to drug use, aggression, and petty crime. The association provides individual and group support to these kids and their parents, according to individual needs.

"Young people trust us because here they are not just a number".

A young NGO member

The number of beneficiaries is constantly growing, in part because there are still so few other institutions and organizations in Split working with youth. *Bridge*

prides itself on its good relationship with its clients, who are coping with some of the most intense problems young people can face. *Bridge* clients also increase their self-confidence and learn key social skills by participating in peer support groups, peer teaching, youth sport festivals, and other programs.

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:NGO:
BRIDGE
.....

:Project:
Small Counseling
Center
.....

:Awarded amount:
79,738,78 kn
.....

:Project dates:
1 March 2003
to
28 February 2004
.....

:Local
community:
Split,
Splitko-dalmatinska
County
.....



Citizen Activism >>

Bridge is very active in promoting volunteerism both within their organization and the city at large. A key aspect of their approach is peer support for troubled youth. Approximately 40 volunteers, mostly students, work with the counseling center's clients, discussing school and family problems. Clients and volunteers also participate in various creative and educational activities or go to exhibitions or on trips together. *Bridge* makes special efforts to inform volunteers about their work regularly and to provide them with training when needed. Occasionally, an ex-beneficiary even becomes a volunteer.

Bridge has also benefited from the assistance of several civil servants (young Croatian men who choose community service instead of mandatory military service) utilizing up to seven at any one time. Some former civil servants stay involved in *Bridge*'s activities even after their mandatory service is completed. *Bridge* also promotes volunteerism among the youth in Split more generally. In Spring 2004, they published a brochure called *Youth Volunteer Work* to encourage secondary school students to volunteer.



Local Partnerships >>

Bridge has an excellent record of cooperation with government bodies at both the local and national level. During and after completion of the CroNGO-supported project, counseling center activities received financial support from city and county authorities, as well as national-level government offices such as the Ministries of Family, Health and Education, and the Office for Prevention of Drug Abuse.

Bridge also cooperates with other institutions and organizations working with youth, including the municipal court, primary and secondary schools, and state-sponsored Centers for Social Welfare in Split, Trogir, Omiš and Kaštela. These institutions refer clients to *Bridge*, while *Bridge* in turn informs them about the status and progress of each client. *"When we began with organized individual and group counseling service with the youth and their parents, nobody believed in us and nobody thought that we were serious"*, said *Bridge*'s leader Đordana Barbarić. *"Now, experts in schools and members of courts and Centers for Social Welfare call us and cooperate with us."*



>> Support and counselling group for parents in Bridge

Furthermore, in March 2004, *Bridge* opened a branch office in Brač staffed by one volunteer after the city government of Postira offered them office space to conduct programs. Finally, *Bridge's* work has been recognized by the national-level Governmental Committee for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, which selected their model as one of the most successful out of 239 programs in the country.

Citizens have been very supportive of *Bridge's* unique model of working with youth. Local media regularly reports on *Bridge's* activities. After seeing an article about *Bridge* in the paper, a local businessman contacted them to see what they needed for their work. The conversation resulted in the anonymous donation of a van that *Bridge* now uses for field trips and other events. Other businesses have donated smaller, yet highly valued items, such as refreshments and office supplies.



>> Association Bridge provides individual and group support to children with behavioral problems and their parents, according to individual needs



Organizational Development >>

CroNGO support allowed *Bridge* to expand their youth services to more clients. Their unique approach to youth outreach, emphasizing volunteerism and peer support, provides a key social service in Split and nearby areas and is seen as a model for other organizations doing similar work. Along with an expansion in youth services, the CroNGO grant enabled *Bridge* to expand their partnerships with a few national governmental bodies and ministries, while also strengthening contacts with the city of Split and Splitsko-dalmatinska County. *Bridge* is presently looking at its financial capacities and is considering providing more training and possibly some financial support to their new staff of counselors.



Summary of CroNGO Impact >>

CroNGO support allowed *Bridge* to respond to a serious community need by expanding the work of a community center for troubled youth. The community center provides troubled young people with the assistance and counseling that has been lacking in their lives, enabling them to better cope with their problems. Through this work, *Bridge* is expanding the number of young clients it is able to serve and has, as an organization, become more able to involve government and non-governmental partners in its activities both programmatically and financially. As *Bridge's* youth programs have expanded, so has its profile in the community, helping the organization build community awareness of their programs and also allowing them to expand their existing work with the homeless. <<

.....
:LCI:

LCI Outstretched
Hand

.....
:Project:

A Step Together

.....
:Awarded amount:

14.250,00 kn

.....
:Project dates:

1 April 2003
to
30 June 2003

.....
:Local

community:

Berak,
Vukovarsko-srijemska
County

:: Citizens Work Together To Increase Community Income ::

Berak is a small village in Vukovarsko-srijemska County in Eastern Slavonia. Like much of the population of Eastern Slavonia, the citizens of Berak found themselves living amongst heavy fighting during the war. Occupied by Serb forces, the village was returned to the Croatian government during the reintegration process between 1996 and 1998. The citizens of Berak continue to cope with the tragic human loss of this period and intense ethnic tensions remain. While most of the village's population are Croatian returnees and ethnic Croat immigrants from Vojvodina and Bosnia, there is also a significant minority population of Serbs and smaller number of Hungarians and Ukrainians. Although armed conflict has ceased, the economic and social development of Berak remains limited and small-scale agricultural activities, such as milk production, continue to be one of the few means of survival for most citizens.

Faced with this bleak reality, several citizens realized that the best way to improve their economic situation and inter-ethnic cooperation was by working together. With this in mind, six citizens of Berak - 5 Croats and 1 Serb - began to jointly collect milk and sell it to Domil, a local dairy company. However, without the appropriate equipment, the milk was being stored in a deep freezer in one person's home, where it sometimes sat for over twelve hours before being picked up by the dairy company. As a result, the quality of the milk was low, decreasing the price which the dairy company was willing to pay the villagers. Additionally, the small size of the freezer limited the amount of milk they were able to collect and sell.

These six villagers realized that the purchase of a *laktofriz*, a special refrigerated container for milk storage, would allow them to collect more milk, keep it at a constant temperature, and sell it at a higher price. However, while many milk companies are willing to donate a *laktofriz* to their local suppliers to ensure higher quality milk, milk production in Berak did not meet the minimum threshold to qualify for such a donation. Since they could not afford to purchase the

\$2,000 piece of equipment by themselves, the six began to explore other options for funding. When they learned about the possibilities of receiving support from the CroNGO Small Grants Program, they came together to form a Local Citizens Initiative called *Outstretched Hand* and successfully submitted a proposal entitled “A Step Together”.

The grant allowed the six milk producers to purchase a *laktofriz*, which had an immediate and significant impact on their lives. Knowing that they can now store a larger amount of milk before it is picked up by the dairy company, the villagers have increased the number of cows they own from 10 to 30 and have expanded their milk production from 60 - 80 liters to 320 - 340 liters a day. Additionally, the villagers now have the opportunity to meet on a daily basis when they drop off their milk. They have also added another member to the group, and hope to continue expanding. Such an expansion would be a significant development for Berak, as this would allow more villagers to increase their basic income, and would increase the resources available for the future sustainability of the group.



Citizen Activism >>

The lingering impact of the intense fighting in Eastern Slavonia has limited the space for effective citizen initiatives, as most residents have struggled simply to rebuild a basic existence. The six original members realized that by pooling their somewhat limited resources, they could produce just enough milk to sell to Domil. To even begin their project, they had to overcome the mental barrier created by the war that destroyed trust and discouraged residents from engaging in cooperative activities. Over time, residents are slowly realizing that change in their economic and social situation can only happen if they work together. The CroNGO grant allowed them to not just increase the quality and quantity of milk they collect and to increase their families' incomes, but helped these individuals break through some of the lingering malaise that grips Berak and other towns and villages in the region.



Local Partnerships >>

A close ongoing partnership with Domil was critical to the success of the project. Domil (or Novi Domil, as it became known after being purchased by Vindija, a larger food products company) is a unique business. They were one of the first companies to start visiting Slavonian villages after the war to collect milk, helping to restart the region's completely devastated economy. Very often, Domil's milk collection costs were higher than their revenues justified. Yet, they continued to collect milk to win the loyalty of their citizen sub-contractors who were dependent on milk production for their incomes. The trust they established among the local people helped them develop a network of 1,900 sub-contractors. According to the Director of Novi Domil, maintaining personal relationships with their sub-contractors is one of their highest priorities in Slavonia.

Domil continues to purchase milk from the members of *Outstretched Hand* and has also donated the chemicals needed to clean the *laktofriz* in order to ensure high quality milk. Now that Domil has been bought by *Vindija*, there are additional possibilities for *Outstretched Hand* and the citizens of Berak to benefit from this partnership. For example, *Vindija* has a separate department for the development of family farms which provides training in a variety of different fields related to the dairy industry, including organization of production, veterinary conditions, and quality control.



Organizational Development >>

The establishment of the LCI *Outstretched Hand* is an example of citizens working together to utilize their capacities for greater benefit.

The CroNGO grant allowed LCI members to immediately increase the quantity and quality of milk they were selling, resulting in greater income for all the participants. CroNGO assistance has also helped *Outstretched Hand* think about the future of their collaborative efforts and consider ways of improving and expanding their activities based on their increased financial capacities.

A first move was to register their organization as an NGO called the *Berak Association of Milk Producers*. A second action was to develop a “machinery ring” whereby members would each contribute materials and machinery for their collective use. Finally, the association has submitted a request to the Croatian Government to allocate common land to it for milk producing purposes. If successful, this would clear the way for more members to join the association and benefit from access to its equipment, land and business contacts. These actions have promoted the association within the community and motivated others to consider future membership.



>> Residents of Berak
collect milk in their new
laktofriz



Summary of CroNGO Impact >>

The acquisition of a *laktofriz* had a profound effect on the community of Berak. Having appropriate equipment to store their milk meant that they could increase production, thereby increasing family incomes and becoming more significant sub-contractors to the dairy industry. Furthermore, as the LCI owns the *laktofriz* (as opposed to it being a donation from one of the dairy companies), the citizens of Berak are able to work with different companies to obtain the best prices for their milk.

Having successfully utilized the CroNGO grant to achieve their immediate goals, the members of *Outstretched Hand* are presently exploring ways to include more Berak citizens in their activities, including their ongoing attempt to obtain more land from the Croatian Government. In many ways, the purchase of this modest piece of equipment has provided members with a greater sense of self-confidence and independence which will contribute to Berak's future economic development. <<

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